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Headline: Five Steps to Safer Healthcare

By Army Staff Sgt. Kathleen T. Rhem, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON - It's your health and Defense medical officials want you to know a few simple steps you can take to safeguard yourself as a DoD healthcare patient.

"We want to make people understand that there are certain things they can do that will minimize patient errors and, even more, will help draw them into their own care," said Dr. John Mazzuchi, deputy for clinical and program policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. "Each person is responsible for his or her own health care, too. We want them to be in a partnership with their doctor."

To help build this partnership, the Quality Interagency Committee (QIC) came up with a list of five things people can do to safeguard themselves from medical errors. The QIC is a group

of healthcare professionals from several federal agencies that deals with quality and safety issues in medicine.

1 - Speak up if you have questions or concerns. Mazzuchi said he wants patients to understand that asking questions shouldn't be seen as challenging physicians. "I'm sure it can be somewhat uncomfortable for a young enlisted person or a spouse of a young enlisted person to be sitting in front of a full colonel who's the physician and start asking questions," he said.

Mazzuchi stressed he's not suggesting patients question the doctor's intelligence, integrity or motivation. But if you have questions as a patient, you need to get those questions answered, he said, noting that patients do a better job of following instructions if they understand the instructions clearly.

2 - Keep a list of all medications you take. "Clearly, medication errors are a major concern because we write so many prescriptions," Mazzuchi said. Because medications can counteract each other or cause a serious reaction when combined, he said it's critical for patients to tell their doctor and pharmacist what medications they're taking, including over-the-counter drugs and supplements, and any allergies they might have.

3 - Make sure you get the results of any test or procedure. "Don't assume that because the doctor has not gotten back to you in two weeks, everything was fine," Mazzuchi said. "That doesn't mean that it couldn't have been lost in the mail or misplaced."

Individuals should call their healthcare provider and ask for an explanation of results they don't understand. "If a result comes back that seems strange, I think it's important for a patient to pick up the phone, call the doctor, nurse or lab tech and say, 'I don't understand these results. Can you go over them with me?'"

4 - Talk with your doctor or healthcare team about your options if you need hospital care. "Certain hospitals do a better job with certain types of surgery than others," Mazzuchi said. "So whenever there's an option, you'd want to go to the hospital that has a record for the best outcomes."

5 - Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery. "If something different happens from what the physician tells you to expect, then you need to bring that to the physician's and nurse's attention immediately. You may be having complications, and you need to say so right away," Mazzuchi said. It's easier to treat you when a problem is brought up right away, he noted.

Mazzuchi said DoD is also working to educate healthcare providers on these issues to make the partnership between provider and patient easier. "We are educating both those physicians who are coming up through medical school and those who are already in practice about the need to go over options and to bring the patient into the health decisions that are being made," he said.

Medical errors might happen, but there are ways to mitigate their seriousness. "Patient errors don't happen because you

have bad people, they happen because health care providers are human beings and they make errors," Mazzuchi said.

"But when you're the most informed, when you really know what's going on about your healthcare, when you understand your options, when you understand what's probably going to happen to you and what to expect after you recover, when you understand what your lab results are and what they mean, you can take better care of yourself," he said.

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Headline: EDIS: A major quality of life program for Navy families

By Lt. Cmdr. Mark C. Russell, MSC, and Cmdr. Robert Buckley, MC, U. S. Naval Hospital, Yokosuka

YOKOSUKA, Japan - The Navy has one of the finest quality of life programs to be found within the Department of Defense or civilian sector -- the Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS). U.S. Naval Hospital, Yokosuka, Japan, is responsible for the EDIS program in mainland Japan.

EDIS is a congressionally-mandated, DoD-wide program dedicated to providing early intervention and medically-related services to eligible military and civilian members and their families.

The goals of EDIS are to: improve the functional and adaptive skills of infants and toddlers with developmental delays; maximize the learning potential of school age children with disabilities; empower families to become active participants in their child's education and development; and enhance the independence of children with disabilities to enable them to function with their peers.

EDIS Japan operates on six DoD installations across 1500 miles and includes Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps communities. Family members of Sailors and Marines can receive comprehensive health related services by well-trained, dedicated multidisciplinary teams.

Each clinic has a full complement of EDIS professionals including occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, child psychologists, social workers, community health nurses, and early childhood special educators. Audiology, child psychiatry, and developmental pediatrics services can also be provided.

Active duty service members also benefit from space A services for audiology, mental health, physical therapy, and occupational therapy provided by EDIS health care practitioners.

Given the overseas environment and forward-deployed status of our families, along with the unique stressors associated with living in Japan, these services constitute a major quality of life program for active duty families.

In 1993, virtually no space A services were made available to the overseas community in Japan. This resulted in the early returns of 78 family members and typically the active duty member as well. EDIS offers local commands significant cost savings by preventing the need for early return to families and personnel transfers.

One of the components of the EDIS program is the ongoing "child find" activities. The purpose of child find is to identify children with special needs as early as possible in order to deliver interventions designed to remediate a child's disability thus improving their educational and developmental prognosis.

For many childhood problems, early intervention is critical for a favorable long-term outcome. In Japan, EDIS providers are engaged in active community-wide child find activities by conducting developmental screenings at the Child Development Centers, health fairs, and primary care clinics. Public announcements are also made through various written and visual media including television ads, to inform the community about available services.

EDIS is a cost effective and major quality of life program, especially for families stationed overseas. Both the quality and scope of services provided by EDIS is comparable to, if not exceeding that which our military families receive in the United States.

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Headline: Physical therapists offer hands-on help to the Fleet
By Bill Doughty U.S. Naval Hospital, Yokosuka

YOKOSUKA, Japan - Broken bones, torn muscles and twisted necks and backs - welcome to the snap-crackle-and-pop world of physical therapy, where the mission is to get people healthy and back on their feet as quickly as possible.

U. S. Naval Hospital, Yokosuka, Japan, recently welcomed a new physical therapist, LTJG Jacqueline Pollock, who is working side by side with the Fleet to heal people and prevent injuries.

"This is my first duty station," she said. "Everybody here is so helpful and willing to give you a helping hand any time you need it."

A cadre of Senior Hospital Corpsmen - trained physical therapy technicians - assist LTJG Pollock. She also works hand-in-hand with LTJG Doug Hood of Educational and Developmental Intervention Services and LT Bryan Bost, physical therapist of USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63).

Lt. Bost provides musculo-skeletal screening and physical therapy on board the carrier.

"My job aboard the Kitty Hawk is to reduce the number of lost work days that our sailors have and to get them back to work as quickly as possible," LT Bost said

When the ship is in port, LT Bost provides physical therapy to patients at the Naval Hospital.

"It gives my patients from the Kitty Hawk a chance to come over here and do a much more extensive rehab than possible aboard ship," he said.

Physical therapists play a critical role in helping commands maintain their operational readiness. Their patients come from a very physically active community.

"We have, on board Yokosuka, a young population who like to get out and play football, softball, soccer, baseball and lift weights," said Lt. Bost. "You name it, they like to do it. Not

to mention the new PRT standards which require us to be in a lot better shape."

Both physical therapists are actively working with area fitness coordinators, helping commands get ready for the Navy's Physical Readiness Test.

"One of my main focuses is patient education," said LTJG Pollock. "We're trying to help the fitness coordinators educate their people on what they can do to prevent injuries before they start exercising."

Physical therapists and technicians have a vested interest in teaching proper exercise technique, preventing injuries, and reducing the "snap-crackle-and-pop."

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Headline: Anthrax questions and answer

Question: Does anthrax vaccine protect against disease if someone inhales anthrax spores?

Answer: The original studies of anthrax vaccine showed 93 percent fewer anthrax infections (combining both cutaneous and inhaled cases of anthrax) among vaccinated people, compared to unvaccinated people.

In those original studies, no cases of inhaled (inhalation) anthrax occurred among vaccine recipients, while five cases of anthrax occurred among unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated people. This difference involved too few people to be statistically conclusive, although the trend is obvious.

It is unethical to intentionally expose human beings to inhaled anthrax to test the vaccine. Instead, anthrax vaccine was tested on animals. After 45 animals received one or two doses of vaccine, 44 of 45 survived aerosol challenge in full health. That one animal died from anthrax exposure two years after the second dose of vaccine. This illustrates the importance of annual booster doses of anthrax vaccine.

These data lead us to expect that anthrax vaccine would be quite effective in preventing inhaled anthrax.

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Headline: TRICARE question and answer

Question: I prefer to see an off base/post civilian doctor. How do I do that and do I have to pay?

Answer: You can enroll in TRICARE Prime and request a Primary Care Manager from the civilian TRICARE network. Otherwise, you can see any physician you want and pay an annual deductible plus part of the cost. Or, you can choose a civilian physician from a select network and pay somewhat less. These two choices are the TRICARE Standard or TRICARE Extra options, respectively.

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Headline: Healthwatch: Rub-A-Dub: Wash Your Hands of Dirt and Grime

By JO1 M. C. Mercado, Naval Hospital Pensacola

For most people hand washing is a subconscious act that takes place after using the bathroom or before a meal. But

proper hand washing can really be a matter of life or death.

Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis first recognized the importance of hand washing as a means of infection control while working at a hospital in Vienna, Austria during the 1800s. Semmelweis noticed an alarming number of healthy, new mothers dying within days after giving birth.

He discovered that student-doctors working in the morgue were also treating the women. However, the doctors were not washing their hands. Semmelweis suspected they were spreading germs from the dead to the new mothers and insisted that they begin a practice of washing their hands before treating patients.

After educating the doctors of his findings, and incorporating regular hand washing practices between patients, Semmelweis saw the mortality rate of the maternity ward drop dramatically.

Though times have changed and medicine has advanced greatly, the Association for Professionalism in Infection Control and Epidemiology maintains that hand washing remains the most powerful defense against infections.

"Germs are all around us and come in different forms," says Veronica Hagann, infection control coordinator at Naval Hospital Pensacola.

Germs from other people can linger anywhere; the office phone, door handles, shopping baskets, money, even the button you push when you call for an elevator. These are items people touch and each time they do, they leave their germs and take away others.

"This is how a lot of common illnesses are spread," continues Hagann. "Airborne viruses include tuberculosis and measles, which are released into the air when an infected person exhales or coughs. Droplet viruses, caused by sneezing and coughing include meningitis, pneumonia and the flu. Contact illnesses include staph infections, food poisoning, pink eye, chicken pox and colds," said Hagan.

You can unknowingly come in contact with these germs. One simple rub of the eye or bite of a sandwich using unwashed hands can introduce any of a number of illnesses into your body. The odds of you or your family catching any of these are greatly reduced simply by washing your hands, according to Hagan.

Handwashing removes dirt, organic material and transient microorganisms. The most important element is friction. You need to rub your hands together with soap for 10 to 15 seconds to loosen up the grit and germs and then rinse.

"It is not the soap that kills the germs," said Hagan. "It is the act of rubbing the hands that loosens the germs and rinsing washes the germs away."

It is important to wash your hands regularly throughout the day. After cleaning the house, petting a dog or returning from an outing, it is important to wash away the germs that you have accumulated on your hands. It especially needs to be done before cooking or eating.

"In general, normal healthy human skin acts as a barrier to keep germs out. Dry or cracked hands have less resistance to

germs. If you have cracks or cuts in your skin, germs have access into your body," said Hagan.

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